



In general, a flower has 4 whorls, or rings, of structures. The outermost whorl is comprised of the sepals. Inside or above that will be a whorl of petals. Inside or above that will be the male stamen(s) and in the center will be the female pistil(s). Seeing what is missing or what is extra beyond these 4 whorls, may help us identify the plant or at least the plant family.

*Hibiscus* has the typical flower of the mallow family (*Malvaceae*).

1. Before the flower opens, the green sepals (a) cover the bud. On hibiscus, an extra whorl of spiky bracts (b) subtends the bud.



2. As the bud begins to open, we see the whorl of bracts (b), the whorl of 5 green sepals (a) and inside that a whorl of 5 brightly colored petals (c).



3. Once the flower opens, the 5 separate petals unfurl and the stamens and pistils are seen in the center (arrow).



4. The stamens (yellow) are fused together by the anthers to form a column. The pistil is in the base of the flower, but the style rises up through the column formed by the stamens and branches into multiple stigmas (red).

